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Some development problems of library co-operation in the System of Scientific and Technological Information (SSTI) in Yugoslavia

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1. Introduction

The rate of change in the information sector today is rapid and not fully predictable. Libraries operate in an ever-changing world, and more than that, libraries themselves are changing faster than before. Because they were regarded predominantly as repositories for printed material in the past, libraries nowadays often have difficulties to convince their environment that they are, and should develop into still more, efficient information centres. Sometimes it is forgotten that for people who need published information libraries should be the proper places to provide for both the information and the documents.

As most libraries cannot work commercially and depend on financial allocations from resources which are often beyond the sphere of their influence, they have financial difficulties in the present, market-oriented time. Furthermore, there exists a prejudice that the more something costs, the better it is. As a result even good library services for science and technology, which do not have to be paid for, are sometimes incorrectly appraised. These common facts are beginning to be considered by Yugoslav librarians who pose a question of the low status of libraries and the profession in general.¹

In Yugoslavia status problems have been growing more and more acute in the last decades. Older libraries have become captives of their inherited book stocks, and at the same time they do not get enough funds for new literature acquisitions and modern equipment. New libraries lack continuity and staff with professional experience, which is no less important. Therefore, Yugoslav scientific and technical libraries, on the whole, cannot offer sufficient modern information services based on collections relevant to their users' needs. Additional documentation, information, and referral services, which have been developed in some special libraries, remained up to the present day out of the sphere of action of most academic libraries. Financing and management of different types of libraries and information centres has been divided between different ministries, and this fact has made the advancement of library networking rather difficult, in spite of the valid library acts which anticipate obligatory co-operation in most activities.

We have evidence, in professional papers and conference contributions through the whole period since 1945, that librarians have been aware of most of the causes of their difficulties and that they have tried to influence their environment, but public climate has not everywhere been inclined to cope with the problems of an inadequate library infrastructure. That is why scientists and engineers have often had to use informal information channels, or travel to bigger centres seeking information essential for their work, instead of being able to use the local facilities.

2. Initiatives for SSTI in Yugoslavia: the impact of UNISIST

The need for organized documentation and information services in Yugoslavia had been generally articulated for a long time, and some actions were attempted in the 1950s, but stimulus for stronger common action was missing before the second half of the 1960s, when the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) launched the project UNISIST, which has been supported and included in the programmes of UNESCO ever since.

UNISIST very soon found a favourable response from scientific circles in Yugoslavia; the study reports were readily translated, and the programme propagated. Scientific communication was identified to be the social function of science, and the scientist to be creator and main consumer of scientific information.² It was identified that information services were inadequate. Yugoslav scientific associations, as the first promoters of UNISIST, started drafting the future national information systems for science and technology. Unfortunately, they failed to ensure the indispensable participation of associations of the information professions.³ Individual information professionals were consulted and included in scientific committees only when necessary. Although in 1974 the programme UNISIST was supplemented by NATIS (later both united into GIP), no notable changes occurred in the Yugoslav environment. Founded in 1974 with the task of promoting the System of Scientific and Technical Information (SSTI), the Yugoslav National Committee for UNISIST gave impetus to a number of actions.⁴ Soon after, the Council of the Community of Science of Yugoslavia took over the idea and formulated the outlines of SSTI. A NATIS-committee or a Committee for GIP was never established in Yugoslavia.

3. Effects of the initiatives for SSTI on libraries

The movements in the scientific community mentioned did not have the desired effect on the development of scientific and technical libraries. The reason for this was the fact that the models offered by the developed world were not properly understood. They were adopted uncritically, without previous investigations of the real information needs, abilities, and deficiencies of the existing systems in Yugoslavia. For example, the role and potential of academic and general research libraries, which had very important collections of scientific literature but underdeveloped information services, were not

recognized at that time. The accent was on 'specialized information centres' which were really needed and mostly not yet established. The necessary prerequisites for the development of specialized information systems were underestimated, the methodology not clear, the plans therefore partly unrealistic, as the later achievements proved. Most specialized information centres were established in addition to the existing advanced special libraries. However, the financing of these new functions was seldom separately covered in proportion to the tasks, so that acquisition of literature and maintenance of general library services became inconsistent in relation to the new information services.

It seems that in Yugoslavia the programme UNISIST was partly misinterpreted. As R. Fiedler stated in 1975⁵ 'while formulating the tasks within the framework of UNISIST its aim was not primarily organization of new, additional institutions, but to give impulse to new understanding of the significance of scientific information for each country's development. The focus was meant to be upon linking and co-ordination of existing organizations and institutions i.e. optimization of the general situation'. Only missing services would have to be established. In Yugoslavia, plans for specialized information systems disregarded to some extent this basic principle.

However, in the field of engineering and technology we have a library which we have to mention as one remarkable positive example at this point. It is the Central Technical Library (CTL) of the University of Ljubljana which has for years been operating very successfully as a central library and information centre for technical and physical sciences.⁶ This library managed to integrate the required functions and serve its users in Slovenia and Yugoslavia best. As the only autonomous technical university library it remained unique in Yugoslavia, and its role in the development of special librarianship and SSTI in Slovenia, and especially the advisory function for the whole of Yugoslavia, cannot be overlooked. But the present paper has to refer to the infrastructure of the whole country, and therefore we have to stress that the Slovene situation cannot be taken to be representative of the other constituent republics. Yugoslav multilingualism, different traditions and needs, and its federal political organization play a key-role in this context, and the other republics are generally less developed than Slovenia.

4. The impact of programmes of IFLA and NATIS

Librarians became acquainted with UNESCO's UNISIST and NATIS (later on GIP) concepts from two sides: through the scientific community and IFLA. As the libraries had been involved in IFLA's programmes for years, they had been following continually the UBC, later UAP, and other programmes and tried to ensure promotion of national and international library co-operation. In the first phase the only promoter of these movements was the Federation of Yugoslav Library Associations. Later on, the Community of the Yugoslav National Libraries also adopted the appropriate tasks. The main aim of all efforts of the library profession has been the realization of an efficient national Library Information System (LIS), which ought to link all libraries. Apart

from that, special librarians stimulated by UNISIST aimed at subject-oriented networks within the framework of SSTI.⁷ The intention of all these efforts has been to connect and advance the existing library and information services for the benefit of all categories of users.

5. Need for co-ordination of LIS and SSTI

Relations between LIS and SSTI, which are two completely separate, unco-ordinated programmes, have seldom been a matter of examination. Partly because of economic difficulties and of inadequate and overlapping concepts, both plans progressed slowly. Co-ordination and organization of LIS is the responsibility of national libraries of the constituent republics and autonomous provinces.⁸ On the other hand, all constituent programmes of SSTI, which are organized within subject fields, have always been federal projects. Since 1986, however, Yugoslav LIS has formally been a federal project, also.

Change in the policy and practice of groups responsible for LIS and SSTI concerning the co-ordination of the programmes has progressed too slowly, in spite of the ever more explicit needs for integration in the modern library and information world. Although LIS is not in the focus of interest of this paper, it had to be mentioned in this context, as SSTI ought to concern special, academic, and partly national and other general research libraries among other institutions.

The first, introductory phase of the SSTI-Project was terminated in 1988 and documented by the publication of the *Programme of the Development of SSTI to 2000*. Further development of SSTI has been stimulated by the government programme *The Strategy of Technological Development of Yugoslavia* which was published a year before, in 1987. This government alignment brought financial support for SSTI and will ensure its faster progress. We can ascertain that this is the first really great success of the Yugoslav scientific community in the last thirty years of effort, and now we can look with more confidence into the future. That is why we want to emphasize that now it is particularly important to harmonize all the existing plans for the development of Yugoslav national information services and the optimization of communication to European and world systems. Adequate SSTI ought to enable both greater Yugoslav scientific productivity and contribute to the world's scientific production on one side and quicker development of Yugoslavia on the other.

6. Some present dilemmas

In November 1987 a Yugoslav conference on the development of university information systems supported by modern information technology was held in Maribor. It is significant that for the first time the role of universities, which have important libraries, was considered in the realization of SSTI.

Yugoslav universities are as a rule more or less just a set of independent faculties and institutes linked in quite loose communities. For this reason,

especially in the big, older universities, library systems are underdeveloped. Libraries are mostly isolated and many of them have a very low status. Rather frequent changes of management systems of universities resulted, in some places, in the disintegration of institutions which had functioned well before. It is notable that some functions of university library and information systems have been successfully developed in the smaller, newer universities.

Library and information systems of individual universities were not meant to play a part in the concepts of SSTI, and it is interesting that the first concepts of LIS did not envisage university systems either. So the initiatives for their establishment have been merely due to local initiatives of the university libraries in question and the willingness for co-operation of individual faculty or institute librarians. The promoters of SSTI could not see the sense in the creation of university library and information systems 'without real contents'.⁹ Obviously, the education of future scientists and engineers as well as the dissemination of information on results of research in universities was not contemplated. The same applies to the elaboration of the question of availability of foreign and national scientific and technical literature to local and remote users in general, and to interdisciplinary questions, which cannot find a proper place in SSTI, which is planned to be a set of specialized information systems.

SSTI has completely omitted publishers and distributors of scientific and technical literature, so that the concept is altogether very incomplete. Its shortages are to some extent due to the fact that some professions have not been sufficiently involved in the creation of the concept and that others were not consulted at all. Here we think of both the information profession and representatives of some categories of users, although in the official documents it is claimed that SSTI is oriented towards users.¹⁰

The concept of SSTI now includes libraries, documentation centres, referral centres, specialized information centres, archives and museums, the Yugoslav bibliographic agency, and computer hosts. Networking and co-operation is planned within 18 scientific fields. Biomedicine, which has shown the best accomplishments so far, serves as a model. If we take some experiences from other countries and some positive results achieved in library systems in Yugoslavia into account, we can assume that these plans are hardly realistic. University and other general research libraries with their information potentials in interdisciplinary fields will certainly supplement these services or bring, as W. Katz says, 'meaning to fragments'.¹¹

Although libraries form by far the greatest part of the planned SSTI, the library profession is very poorly represented in the project management. We cannot predict the moment when true co-operation and mutual consultation will be possible, because of prejudices which exist on both sides, but it is required urgently.

7. Technical libraries of the University of Zagreb: an example

The University of Zagreb is one of the bigger 'old' universities, situated in a very busy industrial region. The most important industries in Zagreb are

metals processing, electrical, electronic and chemical industry, oil and gas, textiles, food processing, leather, paper etc. Some of the industrial enterprises have their own research institutes which have well-organized technical libraries and information centres. But nevertheless the libraries of the University of Zagreb are very important information resources for science and technology in Croatia, since the main scientific disciplines are active in the University.

An investigation of interlending in Croatia showed that three-quarters of all requests were realized in Zagreb, most of them in the field of biomedicine.¹² The number of requests in medicine exceeded those in natural and technical sciences by a factor of two (special libraries in the industry included). Although some of the technical libraries in the University have good and relevant collections, they co-operate less than special libraries and show rather low interlending figures.

In the University of Zagreb 95 bigger and smaller libraries operate, the National and University Library (NUL) being the main library. At the beginning of this century the University library (since 1960 NUL) covered all the subjects read at the University. In 1913 it moved into a new, modern building and catered, according to the university standards of that time, both for the needs of students and scientists. After World War I new faculties and institutes of higher education were founded. This development was quite rapid, so that the University library, as in many other places, could not follow. Faculties and institutes developed their own libraries, and some of them became principal units of the university library infrastructure. Some of them even became the best special literature collections in a particular subject field, in Croatia.

Before World War II the University had only seven faculties, one of them being the Faculty of Engineering (successor of the Technical Institute of Higher Education, which was founded in 1918). This faculty had one central and 32 departmental libraries. The central library had literature in all fields of engineering and technology and catered, after 1956, when the Faculty of Engineering was divided into 4 independent faculties, for all the newly established institutions. In the early 1960s the library collections of the old central library were divided among the new faculties, which founded their own libraries. Only the Faculties of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Geodesy kept a joint central library. So the central technical library of the University ceased to exist almost 30 years ago.

That was the time when the first modern documentation and information centres were organized in Yugoslavia.¹³ Co-operation in documentation was planned to be organized through 17 professional committees, which had to link all the industrial documentation centres. The initiatives brought poor results at that time. In these initial ideas we can recognize the beginnings of the concept of SSTI of today. Afterwards, the idea of specialized centres was formulated, and some of them were established in Zagreb. In the documents on organization of specialized information systems in Croatia, libraries were not mentioned at that time. At the same time, the stimulating role of the CTL in Ljubljana can be seen in the fact that most of the specialized information centres were organized in Slovenia.¹⁴

In the University of Zagreb a new institution besides the NUL was founded a few years after the central technical library had been dispersed in 1967: the Referral Centre (RC). RC was founded with the task of providing information services in science and technology and promoting SSTI in Croatia. It developed a few specialized information centres in science and technology and has been generally engaged in complementary information activities to those of NUL.¹⁵ In 1980 the first attempts of uniting NUL with RC were registered, but they have remained on the whole without results: the two institutions have been operating without co-ordination. NUL is responsible for the development of LIS in Croatia, and RC is the co-ordinator of the development of SSTI in the Republic. RC possesses quite a rich reference library with more literature relevant for science and technology than NUL and offers some other information services to engineers, while NUL maintains all the traditional library services and ought to co-ordinate the whole library and information system in the University. Because of the lack of co-operation between the two central institutions, the faculty and institute libraries have been more or less left to struggle with their difficulties on their own.

Nowadays we have the following faculties in science and technology: the Faculty of Architecture, the Faculty of Civil Engineering, the Faculty of Geodesy, the Faculty of Electrical Engineering, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering and Naval Architecture, the Faculty of Metallurgy, the Faculty of Mining Engineering, Geology and Petroleum, and the Faculty of Chemical Engineering. There are two research institutes as well: the Institute 'Ruder Bošković' and the Institute of Physics are also part of the University. Some of the faculties mentioned above and both research institutes have well-organized central libraries, while the other faculties function with numerous unco-ordinated smaller and bigger departmental libraries.¹⁶

In 1986 the Croatian Library Association (CLA), motivated by an initiative of technical librarians, formed a Section for Technical Libraries. This body of CLA is the only forum for the exchange of professional experience between technical librarians, both those working in academic and special libraries. The question of organization of a central technical library and information centre for Croatia is one of the most important problems, especially for industry.

Since 1988 a new, modern building for NUL has been under construction. New, revised plans anticipate that NUL and RC ought to unite in this new building. We can assume that the central library and information services for science and technology will be provided for by the new institution. But will this really take place? We are expecting a positive answer to this question soon.

8. Summary and conclusions

Yugoslav libraries in the field of science and technology have been a matter of two separate, unco-ordinated information systems: the System of Scientific and Technological Information (SSTI) and the national Library Information System (LIS).

The independent concepts of both information systems, which concern partly the same institutions and aim at the same user population, are due to the fact that they were developed by different professional groups, without the mutual consultation and co-operation needed.

The need for faster progress and integration of these endeavours urgently requires co-ordination of further actions. This is particularly crucial, because the government programme 'The Strategy of Technological Development of Yugoslavia' ensures future financial support only for SSTI.

Some problems of the technical libraries and users in the University of Zagreb have been presented as an illustration of the situation. The University does not have a central technical library and information centre. Some of the needed central services exist, but are realized without co-ordination by two independent institutions: the National and University Library (NUL) and the Referral Centre (RC) of the University. NUL is responsible for LIS, and RC is the promoter of SSTI. The first steps in the integration process of NUL and RC have been undertaken. In connection with the new building of the NUL which is planned to be completed in 1992 integration of both institutions has a better chance.

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